

TOWN OF FRENCH

LAND USE PLAN



PREPARED BY: TOWN OF FRENCH LAND USE COMMITTEE
ASSISTED BY : ST. LOUIS COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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TOWN OF FRENCH LAND USE PLAN FOR THE FUTURE



Process

This land use plan is the result of two separate planning efforts. The first started back in 1995 and resulted in several changes to the French zoning map. After the map changes were implemented, the French Town Board decided they were interested in taking the process a step further, and write a plan that would outline the township's goals and policies regarding future development. What drove this decision were recent conditional use permits granted in the township, and the public interest associated with them. The intent from the beginning was to develop a local plan, written by local residents, to be presented and commented on by the community, and for the result to be a meaningful plan that is action oriented.

Township Rezoning Process

During the fall of 1994, the county gave notice to all townships that they would soon be producing new geographic information system (GIS) zoning maps. The county recommended that townships review their current maps and suggest desired changes. As a result, the French Town Board asked County Planning staff to give a presentation relating to the existing land use and zoning regulations. The Board decided to appoint a committee to study the current map, and make recommendations to update it.

The committee held several working meetings that were open to the public. Issues taken into consideration were: current land use patterns (i.e. commercial, residential, recreational, undeveloped), desired future land use patterns, land ownership (i.e. private, public), lakes, rivers, wetlands, forest management, and roads.

A draft plan was developed and presented to the French Town Board at two public hearings. From the start, the number one goal of the Town Board was to involve as many residents as possible throughout the entire process. To facilitate public input, letters explaining the procedure were sent out to every property owner in the township. In addition, informational boards composed of maps and written descriptions were posted at three separate public locations.

The public hearings were well attended, and as a result of public testimony, the Town Board made several changes to the draft map to meet the desires of local property owners. The final map was presented and approved without change by the St. Louis County Planning Commission and County Board.

Land Use Plan

After taking a break from the planning process associated with the zoning map change, it was time to proceed with the more comprehensive process of developing a land use plan. The process began with the French Town Board passing a resolution in 1997 committing themselves to the process. A six member land use committee, that included three township supervisors, was appointed and given the task of writing the plan with the assistance of St. Louis County Planning Department staff. From the beginning, a substantial effort was made to involve the public in the process, and invite any interested citizen not on the committee to contribute to the plan and attend any or all meetings. All committee meetings were scheduled as the last agenda item at the monthly township meetings.

The process began with the committee's review of community data such as:

- C. Demographic information, including the disparity between year-round and seasonal property owners, and the trend toward year-round residency.
- D. Existing land use patterns, including residential, recreational, commercial, industrial, forestry.
- E. Development densities (i.e. high, moderate and low density areas).
- F. Land ownership characteristics (i.e. private, corporate, township, county, state, and federal).
- G. Layout of existing roads, with special emphasis on upcoming county improvements, condition and inventory of township roads, and potential of system to add pedestrian bicycling and walking paths.
- H. Environmental constraints to development like wetlands, highwater tables, steep slopes and flood plains.
- I. Natural resources such as lakes, rivers, wetlands and soils information.
- J. Public facilities like the French Community Center, fire and emergency services, DNR Forestry and McCarthy Beach State Park.

Some of the above information was already available from the first planning effort to change the zoning map, and several of the base maps were provided by the county GIS system.

The next part of the plan consisted of the committee developing the objectives and expectations of the plan, and identifying and prioritizing issues. The overriding objective of the committee was to develop a plan that was meaningful, action oriented, and that could actually be used as a practical guide by the township and county. The town's intent is not to administer regulations, that is the responsibility of the County, but to rather present a plan for the future that promotes logical development patterns. The main focus of the plan is to preserve and enhance the natural characteristics that make French Township a desirable place to live and visit. The town is rich in north woods character and natural wild life. There is good water quality and beautiful lakes, streams and rivers. ***It is the intent of this plan to insure these unique assents are preserved, and to strengthen the community's identity and sense of place.***

An outline of issues were developed and prioritized, and goals and policies, in addition to general information, were written for each issue. The initial priorities ended up evolving into the varied topics of the plan, but began as the following concepts:

- A. Define and establish a community center, which ended up being called the community core.
- B. Develop use restrictions and design standards for community core.
- C. Address the lack of safe pedestrian access throughout the community.
- D. Develop site design standards for outer lying businesses.
- E. Identify areas for potential collective/community sewers.
- F. Address shoreline and water quality issues.
- G. Address subdivision issues.
- H. Illustrate topics with graphic examples.

Most of this work was done over a two year period at township meetings. Information from the meetings was gathered from the committee, and then compiled by county staff. This process took approximately two years before the plan was ready for public hearing. The township sent a letter to every property owner that outlined the plan and invited them to two meetings (September and October 1999). The meetings were well attended, several issues were raised, and the Town Board made several changes to the plan at subsequent Town Board meetings, resulting in the adoption of the plan by the township on February 2, 2000.

PART I

Township Background

The Town of French (Township 60N.,- Range 21W.) is located in northern St. Louis County, 20 miles north of Hibbing, and adjacent to the Itasca County line. County Highway 5 provides easy access to the community from the north and south. French Township is home of the community of Side Lake and the Sturgeon chain of lakes. The chain is comprised of five lakes that include Big Sturgeon, Little

Sturgeon, South Sturgeon, West Sturgeon and Side Lake. Neighboring lakes include Perch and Beatrice. Pickerel Lake, a designated trout lake, the more remote Shannon Lake, and a handful of smaller water bodies and wetlands also personify the landscape (please see wetland map on page 27). The Sturgeon and Shannon Rivers both flow thru the township and are important water resources. Ten percent of the township's total surface area is comprised of open water, and it is these lakes and rivers that give the Town of French much of its identity. Protecting and enhancing these valuable water resources is a primary goal in making changes to the zoning map, and working toward developing a comprehensive land use plan for the community.



Side Lake

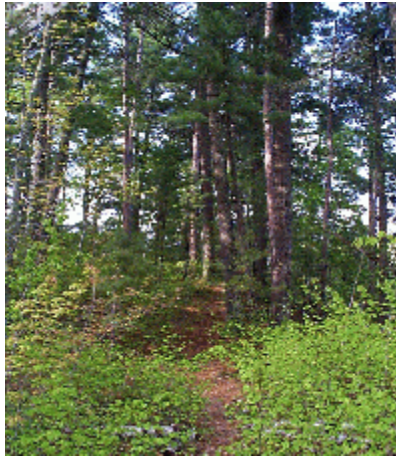
In 1998, the year-round population of the community was 557 (*State Demographer*), but during the summertime, the seasonal population can swell to about 5,000. There has been a trend in recent years towards converting seasonal cabins to year-round dwellings. This trend could double the year-round residency to 1,000 people during the first part of the millennium. Unfortunately, many of the area's lakeshore lots are not sufficient to handle this pressure. Inadequate size, steep slope, and lack of elevation above the ground water table, limit the amount of development a parcel can handle. Many problems are associated with increased development. An increase in the number and size of buildings results in more wells and septic systems, and over crowding. More impervious surface increases rainwater run-off, which is the cause of erosion and sedimentation into lakes and streams. Additional development may result in less vegetation along shorelines, a decrease in natural shoreland areas that are undeveloped, and reduced water quality. Overcrowding does not occur all at once, it occurs lot by lot. It is important for lakeshore property owners to develop their lots in harmony with the landscape, and at a scale the parcel can handle. Fortunately, most people recognize that this degradation threatens the natural beauty that originally attracted them to the area.



McCarthy Beach

The township is the home of McCarthy Beach State Park, which features one of the premier swimming beaches in northern Minnesota. McCarthy Beach boasts eight miles of hiking trails winding through an undisturbed wilderness setting. Numerous campsites are located among magnificent virgin pines. During the warmer and traditional tourism months, the park draws numerous visitors. In winter months, the park's nordic ski trails, ice fishing, and the snowmobile trail system draws more people every year.

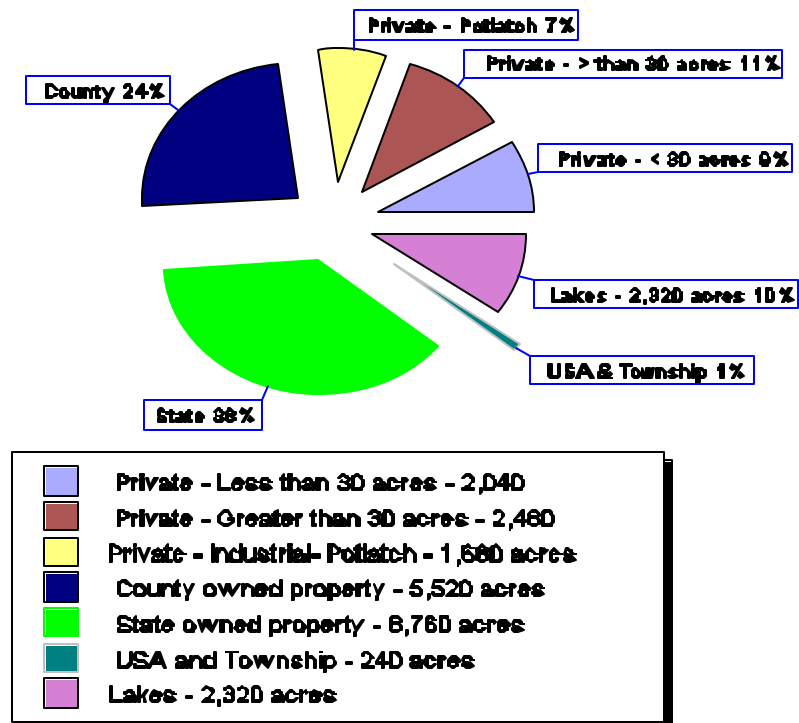
There are four lodging facilities outside the park available in the community, all adjacent to the lakes chain. They are Pine Beach Resort and Campground, Sturgeon River Landing, McNair's Bed and Breakfast and Bimbo's Motel. The resorts provide lodging in the form of cabins, motel rooms and



campsites. There is also a private campground in the area. Camp 717 is located adjacent to the park, at the site of the historical CCC Camp 717.

The peaceful serenity of the area's forested rural environment offers diverse recreational

French Property Ownership



opportunities. Eleven percent of the total land in French Township is divided into parcels of thirty acres and larger. Sixty-three percent of the land is owned and administered by public land and forestry departments. An additional seven percent of the land is owned by Potlatch Paper Company. Most of these lands are open to the public for hunting, trapping, berry picking, hiking, snowmobile and ATV trail riding, bird watching, and various other activities.



French Town Board meeting.

On a combination of private and public lands, the timber industry impacts the community with an estimated yearly harvest of 100-150 acres, yielding approximately 3,000 cords of wood. The Town of French has historically, and will continue to be, relied upon for its forest resources. This is due to its proximity to various paper, board, and sawmills, the quality of timber, and the fairly level topography. The French Town Board encourages loggers to adhere to the DNR's Best Management Practices and Visual Management Guidelines for logging on all types of land ownership within the township. (Please see land ownership graph below - *Source: Town of*

French).

The local governing body is the Town of French Board of Supervisors, made up of three voting members, a clerk and treasurer. The town also hires their own assessor. This elected body sets the annual levy, provides land use planning input, provides road maintenance, fire protection, and maintains a budget for recreation. French Township was organized in the early 1900's, and in 1906 had \$39.71 in the treasury.

The Town of French is the owner and administrator of a fifty-five acre parcel in the heart of the community. Extensive development of this reclaimed borrow pit over the past 13 years has turned the area into a well designed community center, complete with baseball field, volleyball courts, a tennis and basketball court, hockey rink, hiking/ski trail, community forest, three-season pavilion, and community meeting facility with the township office. This facility provides recreational opportunities for youth, community members, and visitors to spend their free time in a healthy outdoor setting.

The primary soil classification in the township is Menahga-Graycalm sand, a large band of the desirable soil extends from Sand Lake, 12 miles to the east, to Thistledew Lake in Itasca County. This type of soil exists throughout the township except for about two square miles north of the Snake Trail, and about three square miles south of the Sturgeon River. This medium and course sand may also contain thin bands of less permeable loam material. Taylor-Indus clay is the soil classification for the parcel north of the Snake Trail, which is an upland clay. The three square mile parcel south of

the Sturgeon River, in the Greenrock Road area, has soils classified as Nashwauk-Keewatin, which is a clay loam. Ledge rock exists under this soil, with many outcrop protrusions. Pockets of peat are also found in this general area.

The combination of Side Lake's close proximity to the Iron Range, the lakes, beautiful park, and forested rural beauty, has made it a much sought after area for tourism, recreational activities, and seasonal and year-round inhabitants. With careful planning, low-impact land use practices, and most important of all, land-owner stewardship and participation in the community, Side Lake can keep its unique character during these times of change and development pressure.

THE LAND USE PLAN

Establish a Community Core

The community core is located within the SMU-11 zone district from the Sturgeon River Landing to McCarthy Beach Park and the CCC Campground, east to Highway 5, and from the Riverside, past the Community Center to Bimbo's.



The community core should be modeled after the "traditional small town." Planned between existing and future residential properties, which are the predominate use, are street edged buildings, mixed uses, commercial uses meeting everyday needs, gathering spots, open space, and pedestrian ways. The traditional town has respect for human scale and underscores a sense of community. They are compact, but are developed based on environmental capacity, and ideally, the traditional town is designed within feasible walking or biking distances. This is in contrast to suburban style, residence-only communities and strip mall commercial developments with large parking lots between the road and building. It is not the intent to create a downtown like

you may see in a small city, but rather to specify an area in the community where certain types of commercial activity, if designed properly, are welcome.

Find and Link Centers of Activity

One way to enhance a sense of community in French Township is to clearly identify centers of activities. One approach would be a plan to link these areas by a pedestrian walkway/bike path. Doing so would emphasize the importance of the community's core and encourage activity in these areas. It would also encourage businesses that are oriented toward public gathering spots to locate there, opposed to quieter areas.

Centers of Activity are gathering places that serve as formal and informal meeting places for local people and visitors. They are places where people see and interact with each other. They may include a coffee shop, a tavern, a convenience store, the beach, or a bench in front of the post office. They are located within the fabric of the town rather than in isolated areas. Concentrating centers of activity and connecting them via pedestrian ways provides a basis for a richer civic life.

Link Centers of Activity through a Road Safety Enhancement

Project for Pedestrian and Bike Travel

A list of roadways for this safety project have been identified and prioritized. Once completed, these enhanced roadways will link the community core and will provide safe access and recreation on several

miles within the community. The safety enhancement design will primarily consist of extended shoulders (5'-6') along existing roads. When complete, these enhanced roadways will be linked with the existing McCarthy State Park trail system and the Mesabi Trail. The link to the Mesabi Trail is via Highway 5, which meets bike trail standards with its current shoulder width. The roadways will be well marked for non-motorized users, and will remain separate from the snowmobile trail. There are five separate phases (please see pedestrian/bike map below).

1. **McCarthy Beach Access** - From McCarthy Beach Park on County Road 915, extending south on County Road 65 to Rudstrom Road, and east on 65 to State Trunk Highway 5. This route is funded for the 2000 construction season.
2. **Mesabi Trail Link** - State Trunk Highway 5 from the Strizich Road to the Sturgeon River. An upgrade is scheduled for this segment of Highway 5 during the summer of 2000. The trail will be built in conjunction with this project.
3. **Greenrock Loop** - County Road 65 from Highway 5 to the Sturgeon River (future).
4. **Rudstrom Spur** - Along the entire length of Rudstrom Road (future).
5. **Pickerel Lake Spur** - From McCarthy Beach Campground north on County Road 915 extending to the Pickerel Lake Road.



Business Establishments within the Community Core

The goal is to restrict businesses to types where people gather and that meet everyday public needs. Prohibited in this area are borrow pits and other industrial uses. The following business types shall be allowed within the community core through a conditional use permit:

1. Banks
2. Bed and breakfast, hotel/motel
3. Churches
4. Community clubs and facilities
5. Daycare centers
6. Gas stations
7. Neighborhood commercial
8. Offices
9. Planned unit developments
10. Public and semi public uses
1. Restaurants/liquor establishments
2. Retail sales of goods and services
3. Related uses.

Site Design Standards for Commercial and Public/Semi-Public Uses within the Community Core

1. Buildings shall be located to front towards and relate to roadways to the greatest extent possible. The intent is to create a traditional “street line of facades,” with buildings forming an attractive edge to road way. Existing examples of this site design are the Riverside Inn and Sturgeon River Landing.
2. Require parking lots to be sited behind commercial buildings to screen it from roadways. If a rear parking lot in not feasible, the parking lot may be located to the side of the building as an

- alternative. Where parking lots are sited to the side and exposed to view from the roadway, the lot must be screened by natural vegetation, berms, hedge, or other landscaping. Regardless of type, it must be a minimum of five feet in height. The height of the buffer shall decrease where driveways approach paths and roadways in order to provide adequate visibility.
3. Ingress and egress driveways entering a roadway must be delineated.
 4. Use of natural vegetation, especially the retention of larger trees, between street and building and throughout the entire site is encouraged.
 5. Commercial uses, along with public and semi-public uses, may be mixed and integrated with residential uses.
 6. Pedestrian friendly access to business sites are encouraged.
 7. Change setback within community core from 85' to 68' from road centerline.
 8. Commercial and public/semi public uses shall be allowed on lots of .5 acres and 100 feet in width if all other pertinent standards are met.

Commercial and Public/Semi-Public Building Facade and Design Requirements within the Community Core

1. Building facades shall reflect a north woods character that features natural building materials and colors. Building materials such as natural wood, logs, brick, stucco and stone are encouraged.
2. Facades shall be required to be covered with wood, stone or brick, so at least one-third of the building front is covered with this type of material.
3. Building trim, such as fascia, eaves and accents are encouraged to be of wood or earthtone colors.
4. Outdoor patios and decks are encouraged.
5. Awnings are encouraged.

Signage within the Community Core

1. Commercial signs shall be of a north woods character and design. Brighter colors may only be used as accents and letters.

Lighting within the Community Core

1. Lighting shall be directed toward the ground and shall not be directed onto roads, adjacent properties, or lakes.
2. Covered or hooded lights are encouraged.
3. Flood lights are discouraged.

Below are Four Community Core Development Scenarios



Figure 1 This is a good example: The building is fronted toward the street, a landscaped berm enhances the building and screens the driveway and parking lot, and the building materials and sign are rustic in nature.



Figure 2 Also a good example, but with fewer positive elements as in figure 1.



Figure 3 This is how the Riverside actually looks. It is a good example of traditional community development, as the building fronts toward the roadway, the majority of parking is to the side and a lot of natural vegetation has been retained.



Figure 4 This example shows the least desirable scenario with the building set way back, and a large parking lot between the road and building.

Commercial Development Located on Lakeshore

The primary goals when reviewing a new business, or an expansion to an existing business, where allowed, is to minimize impact to the natural characteristics of the shoreline, to assure that water quality is undiminished, and to limit the impact on nearby residential property owners. The following standards should be applied to commercial development on lakeshores:

1. The retention of natural vegetation within the shore impact zone should be required as a condition of permitting. Vegetative buffers along lot lines and roadways are strongly encouraged.

2. Where existing vegetation is minimal within the shore impact zone, along lot lines and adjacent to roadways, an aggressive re-vegetation plan should be required.
3. The amount and size of impervious surface areas should be minimized in favor of the retention or restoration of natural areas.
4. Natural open-space areas should be maximized, and should be clearly identified on development proposals.

Business Development Outside the Community Core

Much of this property is zoned MUNS (Multiple Use Non-Shoreland) and FAM (Forest Agricultural Management). The goal here is to minimize the impact of businesses on adjacent properties, neighborhoods, the natural environment and driving public, but at the same time to allow the type of commercial uses not appropriate within the community core. Special protection needs to be given to properties where residential shoreline development is directly across the road. Also, sites adjacent to Highway 5 deserve special consideration relating to the appearance of the property. Business types that may be appropriate within the rural areas outside the community core may include: mini-storage facilities, auto repair, light rural industries, home businesses, etc.

The following standards should be applied to conditional use permits:

1. Require a substantial vegetative buffer between the road and businesses such as auto repair, rural industries, and mini-storage. In most cases, a minimum 50 foot buffer should be required. Driveways should also be designed with a curve to minimize visibility into the site.
2. Sites with no existing screening should be encouraged to establish a substantial buffer where appropriate.
3. For a business that needs exposure, such as a retail operation, a substantial buffer should not be required, but rather a landscape plan that enhances the north woods character of the property.
4. Sites where there are lake homes across the road, or where rural homes are in close proximity, are only appropriate for low impact, nonintrusive businesses.
5. Since Highway 5 is the main access into the community and the first impression of the driving public, special sensitivity needs to be applied to proposals within this corridor.
6. No new borrow pits shall be allowed within the township except in sections 1,12,13 and 24.

Below, Please See Site-Design Examples of a Business Outside the Community Core



Figure 15 This is a great example of an unobtrusive commercial development. The buffer, earth-tone colors, narrow drive, and tasteful sign all enhance this site.



Figure 16 What a difference removing part of the buffer and widening the driveway makes.



Figure 17 Would you want a development that looks like this in Side Lake?

Business Uses within the (Shoreland) Residential Zone District

The purpose of establishing the **Residential Zone District** adjacent to most of the shoreline within the township was to prohibit commercial uses except home businesses and home occupations. An accompanying intent was to also limit the size and type of home businesses allowed. The type of home business allowed in non-riparian rural areas like an automotive business, product manufacturing or similar operation, is not appropriate within this (Shoreland) Residential Zone District. Only very low impact home businesses should be permitted.

Shoreland Residential Use

An explosion in residential construction along the shores within the township threatens to degrade water quality, wildlife, and the beauty of natural looking shorelines. More than ever, people are choosing to

turn seasonal into year round residences, replacing small cabins with large homes, constructing additions, garages and pole buildings. The buildup on the lakes mean more septic systems, roads and driveways, and less trees and natural areas. But there are effective ways to mitigate the negative impacts of development through property owner awareness and education, best management practices, and land use regulation.

There are two important goals that all shoreland property owners should work toward when developing their lakeshore lots. One is to manage their development so that **water quality** is undiminished. The second goal is to retain the untouched natural **visual qualities** inherent in shoreland areas. It is interesting that the means to achieve these goals are the same in several areas. You can not separate the land use management techniques required to succeed at attaining both high water quality and visual qualities. St. Louis County publishes a folder that outlines the best management practices for achieving high water and visual qualities in shoreland areas. These practices have been expanded upon below, and are meant to serve as guidelines for shoreland property owners, in addition to local government bodies that review and decide upon specific construction projects.

Water Quality

Lakes, like other ecological systems, do not have an unlimited capacity to incorporate changes due to increases in housing development, and other human endeavors. At some level of development, lake resources will become strained to their limit. Beyond that point, the water resource, real estate values, and user satisfaction will decline. Eutrophication is the process where lakes change because of an overabundant supply of nutrients. Excess phosphorus, nitrogen and other materials like fertilizers cause rapid growth to aquatic weeds and algae. This growth causes a buildup of muck on the bottom, and the replacement of sport fish, such as Bass, Northern and Walleyes, by rough fish like Carp. Many of these negative effects can be mitigated, however, through sensitive, low impact development practices. Lake shore property owners need to be aware that water quality problems are directly related to excessive development and result from sedimentation and nutrient loading. The way land is managed has a great impact on the quality of water and ecology of lakes and rivers. Lakes do not become degraded all at once, it happens lot by lot. That is why it is so important for every property owner to be aware of their impact and their ability to contribute to the quality of *their* lake.



Good example of dwellings blending into shoreline on Side Lake.

The Following Shoreland “Best Management Practices” are ways Property Owners can Contribute to the Health and Vitality of *Their* Lake

1. **Filter Strips** - These are natural areas adjacent to the shores of lakes that help prevent contaminants from entering the water. The best filter strip is mature natural woodland with full-ground level, mid-story and upper-story growth.

2. **Sewage Treatment** - Maintaining a proper sewage treatment system will prevent contaminants from leaking into the ground and surface waters.
3. **Erosion and Sediment** - Eroded soil and sediment contain nutrients that promote excessive algae and bacteria in lakes. Correct erosion problems as they occur by using mulch, sod and natural vegetation to minimize soil exposure and loss.
4. **Lawns and Gardens** - Carefully evaluate the need for lawn areas and try to minimize size in favor of natural areas. Use of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides can reach and degrade lakes and rivers.
5. **Toxic Chemicals** - Avoid using toxins, as they will reach the ground water and lake through your septic system, by direct contact with the soil. Use biodegradable soaps and household products. Carefully handle gasoline and motor oils, especially when on or near water. Dispose of toxins properly.
6. **Storm Water Runoff** - Buildings, roads, driveways and patios add hard surfaces which are impermeable to water and increase runoff. The greater the runoff, the greater the potential for erosion and sedimentation into the lake. Hard surfaces should be minimized.

Visual Qualities

People value natural appearing shoreland areas. Good visual qualities come from a sense of an untouched *natural* look. Shoreland regulations alone cannot accomplish this goal, people need to be taught that low-impact, sensitive development is in their best interest. Shoreland owners have the privilege and responsibility to preserve and develop their land in harmony with the natural environment. The intent here is to encourage people to incorporate the following construction principles into their development plans, in addition to requesting the County Board of Adjustment and Planning Commission to require applicants to adhere to these principles when applicable.

1. **Native Screening** - Retain as much natural vegetation on lakeshore lots as possible, especially within 50 feet of the shore. Plant additional native vegetation to improve screening, visual qualities and prevent erosion and sedimentation from entering the lake.
2. **Structures** - The most dramatic change to the appearance of the shore is usually the result of structures. Structures should be designed as sensitively as possible to blend into the natural landscape.
3. **Building Size** - Minimize the overall size of the structure and the profile facing the water. Face appropriate rooms towards the water view. Avoid having bathrooms, closets, garages or other windowless rooms facing the water. The Town of French recognizes the importance of limiting structure widths to 40 percent of the lot's width, as is required in the County Zoning Ordinance. Minimizing the height of a structure is also valuable. This is especially crucial where

there is a reduced shoreland setback, and/or minimal screening. The larger the structure, the further it should be setback from the shoreline.

4. **Building Materials and Color** - Select materials that are natural or have a natural appearance. Dark earth-tone colors blend in best with the natural environment. This is important for siding, trim and roofing materials.
5. **Accessory Structures** - If an accessory structure is needed, limit it to one if possible. Excess structures add visual clutter to the area. Incorporating garages and storage areas into the main structure is beneficial. Where detached garages or pole buildings are desired, size them to fit the property. For example, a 40 x 42 foot garage is too large for a one acre lot.
6. **Docks and Boat Storage** - Limit their impact by keeping their size to a minimum, carefully choosing the site, and designing them to blend in with the shoreline. Use natural colors for docks, boat lifts, covers and canopies.
7. **Shoreland Alterations** - Altering the natural topography of a shoreland lot usually results in a devastating scar that lasts for a long time, and decreases the value and enjoyment of the property.

**COUNTY REGULATIONS RELATING TO VEGETATION
REMOVAL IN SHORELAND AREAS WITHIN THE SHORE
AND BLUFF IMPACT ZONES:**

- ? The removal of more than 25 percent of trees, shrubs and plants is prohibited, and may only be removed by human means (i.e. hands, ax, saw). Allowed removal must be throughout the entire width of the property, and not in a contiguous strip or row.
- ? Property owners may not remove vegetation beyond the parameters above, and replace with grass.
- ? The trimming and pruning of trees is allowed at any time.
- ? Dead, diseased, damaged, and dangerous trees may be removed at any time.

Where alterations are absolutely necessary, make sure the project is well planned by a professional, and erosion control measures are implemented until vegetation is re-established.



Figure 19 Undeveloped lot.



Figure 20 Developed with dwelling, but retained vegetation.



Figure 21 Developed with small yard.



Figure 22 Too much vegetation has been removed within 50 feet of the lake.

**Below,
Please
see
Lakesho**

re Lot Development Scenarios



Figure 23 Way too much vegetation removed.

Roads

Public perception of community character is largely based on what can be seen from an automobile. “The view from the road” is more than a phrase. For many, it comprises virtually everything we know about the natural and human made features of our landscape. The Town of French has several scenic roads that make driving within the community an enjoyable experience.

Perception of road character is primarily based on two factors. The *design of the road itself*, and the *view from the road*. Obviously, the experience of traveling

down a wide four-lane concrete road with adjacent strip malls, parking lots, and billboards is significantly different than driving down a two lane gravel road that winds through the rural and forested landscape. Following are some best management practices recommendations for retaining forested rural road character.

Road Design

Width and Curves - The width of a road should be appropriate to its functions.

It is important for a road to be wide enough to handle traffic safely and for maintenance and snow plowing crews to do their job effectively. However, the good intentions of designing roads to be very wide and without curves has its negative effects. Especially for lakeshore and rural subdivisions, where only a few dozen lots are being served, a wide driving surface with shoulders in accompaniment with only gentle curves, tends to encourage motorists to travel faster than what is desirable. Most cars and pickup trucks are only 5 to 6 feet wide, and even dump trucks and school buses rarely exceed seven feet in width. For most new subdivision roads, a 20 foot wide driving surface with shoulders is sufficient.

Corridor - The typical right-of-way corridor is 66 feet. Obviously, it is not necessary to clear the entire width of the corridor. How much vegetation remains along the road side has an influence on the road character. A wide corridor is less desirable than one where the trees form a canopy over the roadway.

The following design standards should be considered when new roads are constructed, or reconstructed:

1. A high priority should be placed on preserving a forested rural road character.
2. New subdivision plat roads should be constructed at a 20-22 foot width.
3. Curves that add character and slow traffic are encouraged.
4. Vegetation within the right-of-way corridor should be retained to the greatest extent possible.

The importance of scenic roads was highlighted in the Report of the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors, and found that:

77 percent of the population enjoys driving for pleasure and sight seeing.

Pleasure driving accounts for 15 percent of all vehicle miles driven.

Pleasure driving is the second most popular

Greenways and Buffers

Greenways and buffers are terms that describe vegetative corridors that can be used for a multitude of purposes. Common uses of vegetative buffers include: enhancing the separation of differing land uses, furnishing privacy between residential properties, and providing natural filters for rain-water run-off between developed areas and streams, ponds, and lakes. Less common, but becoming more popular, applications are for recreational purposes such as hiking and biking trails, and in new subdivisions where local governments require a public dedication, or common ownership of open space.

The following applications of greenways and buffers are encouraged by the Town of French:

1. Vegetative buffers should be required by the Planning Commission when reviewing conditional use applications. Buffers should be required along shorelines, roads, sides and the rears of properties. For businesses such as auto repair, storage facilities or light industrial, a substantial buffer is appropriate. For retail businesses, landscaping that would allow exposure is acceptable.
2. Residential property owners are encouraged to plant and retain as much vegetation as possible between roads, neighbors and lakes and rivers.
3. Require developers to dedicate greenways and buffers as permanent open space when subdividing property.

Subdivision Plats

Most subdivisions approved in this state, and around the country in the last 40 years have been the conventional, suburban type, “cookie cutter” design. The typical standards developers have to fulfill include lot frontage and size standards, dry soil for a foundation and septic system, and an access road. The end result of a built-out subdivision of this type is typically a complete conversion of the original character of the property, where most acreage is designated for buildings, manicured lawns and streets.

There is a proven alternative to the typical subdivision design, open space development design (OSDD). The basic premise behind OSDD is to create a win-win-win situation for all concerned, the developer, home owner, and community. The developer can often achieve greater densities, and save money on road costs. The home owner lives in a neighborhood where they are guaranteed natural vistas, enhanced wildlife, the potential for trail development, and lower septic and road maintenance costs, and the community retains its natural character and desirability. The design goal is to preserve open space and natural areas, while allowing the same or more density as in a traditional subdivision, but in the form of compact residential areas carefully located and designed to reduce the perceived intensity.

This development philosophy can be used on shoreland and rural parcels. In French Township, there are few remaining undeveloped shoreland tracts, but because of the shortage of shoreland properties, one would expect to see future second tier, and rural developments, as is the trend in other recreational areas of the state.

French Township adopts the following goal relating to future land subdivisions:

1. When in the planning phase, and as one possible option, encourage developers to include a design that incorporates permanent preservation of open space, and more compact residential lots.

Below are two examples. The first is a traditional subdivision layout, and the second is an example of open space development design (*Source: Rural by Design, Randall Arendt*). On page 19, there are examples of four subdivision alternatives, and how design and densities influence the impact on the landscape.

Traditional and Open Space Subdivisions

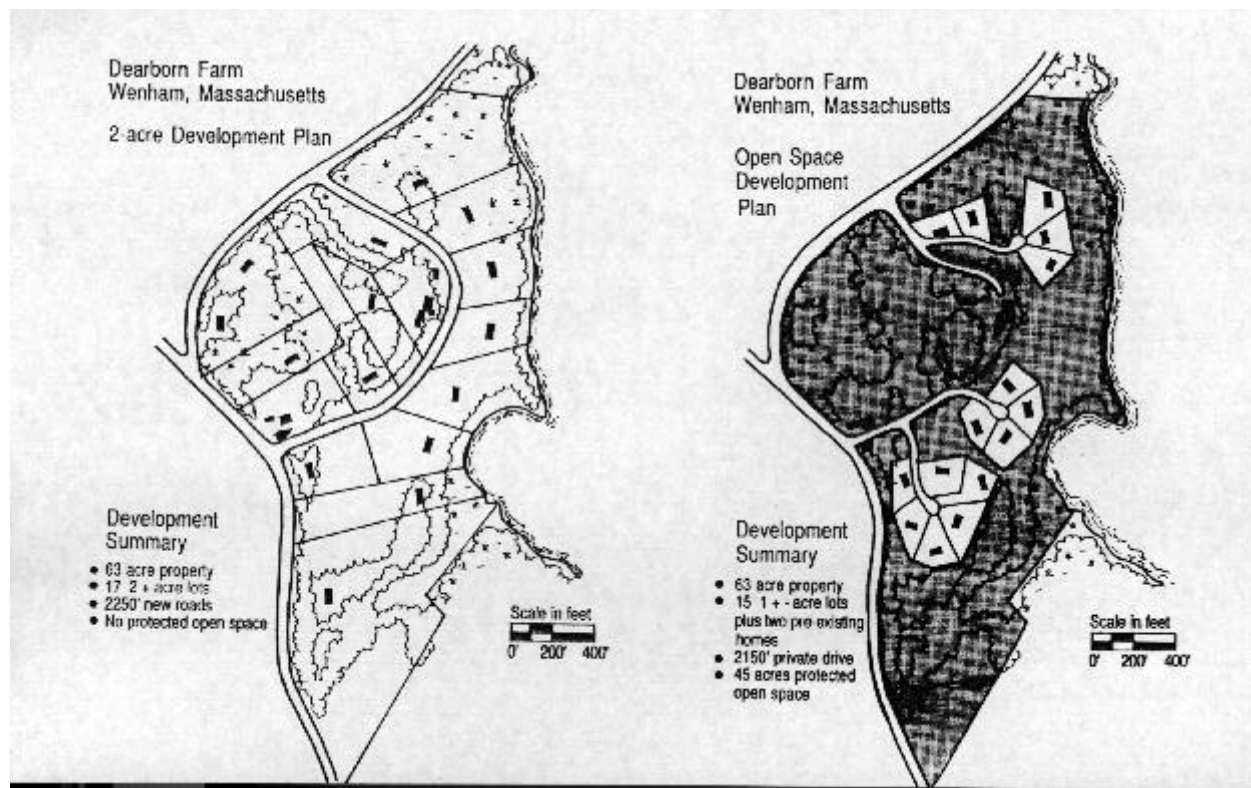




Figure 25 Undeveloped parcel approximately 400 feet wide.

Example of How Design and Density Influence Impact on the Landscape



Figure 26 Two, two-acre lots with intact shore impact zones, and low-impact development.



Figure 27 Example of a cluster development with four dwellings.



Figure 28 Example of four one-acre "urbanized" lots.

Sewage Treatment Systems

Failing sewer systems are a concern in any lakeshore community, and unfortunately, the Town of French is no different. The township has sandy soils which are good for sewage treatment, but for varying reasons, there are still problem areas adjacent to shorelands (see map of Sewer Management Opportunity Areas on page 23). Many lots within the red shaded areas do not have sufficient area for standard on-site sewage treatment systems. The problems in siting systems in these areas vary on each separate lot, but usually consist of one or more of the following reasons:

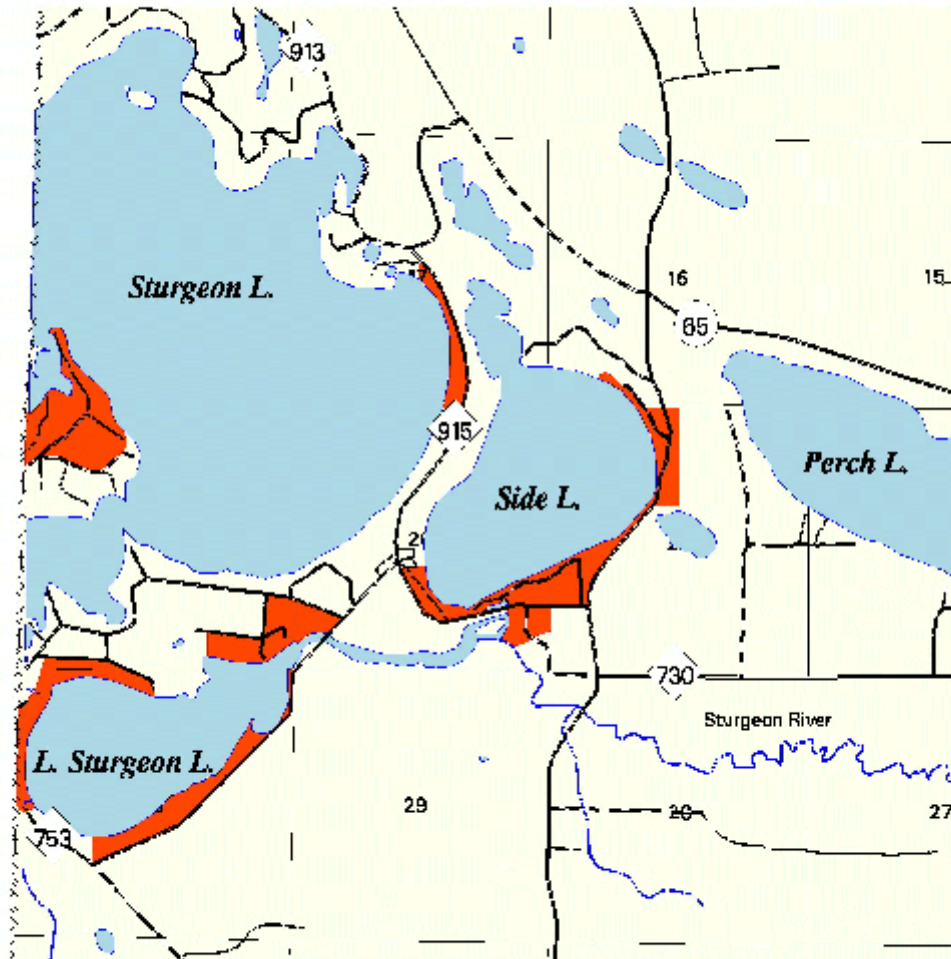
1. **Substandard Lot Size and Width** - most of the existing lots are less than one acre and 150 feet in width, which is the minimum requirement for siting a sewer system under *ideal conditions*. Lots containing highwater table and steep slope would require even larger lot sizes. Many lots range from .3 to .75 acres and are less than 100 feet in width. Lot size is important to provide setbacks (separation distances) from your own and neighboring wells, lakes and rivers and buildings.
2. **High Water Tables** - The most important element in treating sewage is the vertical separation distance between the seasonally high water table and the bottom of the sewer system. Sewage needs to be filtered through a minimum of three feet of unsaturated soil to provide adequate treatment. A minimum of one foot of original inorganic unsaturated soil needs to be present to construct a standard mound system.
3. **Filled Wetland Areas** - In several areas, original wetlands were filled to provide upland areas for development. Currently, State of Minnesota Rule 70-80 (State Sewer Regulations) requires a one foot minimum of *original* inorganic soils to construct a mound. The filled areas, even if done years ago, does not meet this requirement.
4. **Steep Slopes** - Areas with slopes that are so steep that heavy machinery can not be safely operated on, are unavailable for septic construction. Also, slopes in excess of 3:1 are subject to surface discharge of effluent prior to adequate treatment.

5. **Dry Wells** - Dry wells are a system designed to dispose of sewage, but not to treat it. Thus, they are harmful to the environment. They have also been deemed an automatic failing system by the State of Minnesota.

Recommendations

1. Use of holding tanks where no other options exist.
2. Limit development of buildings and driveways.
3. Limit water use by eliminating laundry, garbage disposals, bath tubs, and using low-flow fixtures.
4. Limit use to seasonal. Small lots should not be developed as year round.
5. Develop collector systems that serve more than one and up to several properties.

Sewer Management Opportunity Areas



PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The manner for implementing the concepts of this plan are as follows:

Board of Adjustment/Variance Applications

The St. Louis County Board of Adjustment will have a copy of this plan readily available to them so they can use it when making decisions in regard to variance applications. The Town Board may provide input on variance applications only if the property of the applicant is within 1/4 mile of township property.

Planning Commission Public Hearing Items

The Town Board may provide input on any agenda item before the St. Louis County Planning Commission.

Information about the application will be provided to a site-plan review committee who will formulate a written document. The purpose of this document will be to ensure local community input and that direction is provided to the Planning Commission. The intent of this comprehensive review is to allow the applicant the opportunity to inform the site-plan review committee of their plans and intentions.

The applicant will be given the opportunity to participate in the site-review meeting. If the applicant chooses not to participate, the site-plan review committee will make their decisions and recommendations based on the material that they receive from the county.

Special Meeting/Site Review Process

The French Town Board of Supervisors will call for a special meeting within 30 days of receipt of a conditional use permit application.

The applicant will be contacted by the township clerk, and if the applicant wishes to participate in this review process, the special meeting will be held initially at the site of the development project, then reconvened at the town hall following the on-site inspection. This meeting will be scheduled for a time and date that is convenient with the applicant.

The Agenda for the On-Site Portion of the Special Meeting is as Follows

1. Review the application as written
2. Obtain clarification/explanation of application from applicant (not more than 30 minutes)
3. Inspect site
4. Review issues with county planning representative. This person will provide technical expertise on ordinances and other related matters.

Immediately following the on-site visit, this meeting will re-convene at the town hall.

The Agenda for this Portion of the Special Meeting is as Follows

Identify concerns/issues as a group

1. List issues in two separate lists:
 - a. Those with positive effects
 - b. Those with negative effects
2. Identify mitigations (if any) for the issues on the “negative” list
3. Town Board Supervisors vote to either support or oppose the application
4. Clerk drafts a letter to the County Planning Commission with the Town Board input, to include:
 - a. Board’s decision to support or oppose the application
 - b. Concerns/issue list, with possible mitigations
 - c. Reasons for the Board’s decision
5. If possible, one of the supervisors will attend the Planning Commission meeting.

If the applicant chooses not to participate in this review process, the same basic meeting agenda will be used, except the on-site portion of the review will be deleted.

The Following Persons will be in Attendance at the Special Meeting

3-Town Board Supervisors
 1-Township Clerk
 1-Township Treasurer
 1-County Planning Representative
 3-Committee Members
 Applicant(s)

SITE-PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE

This committee will be comprised of three elected Town Board Supervisors (the only voting members on the committee), the Clerk, Treasurer, and three appointed members of the community.

1. All persons except Town Board Supervisors are non-voting members at this meeting.
2. Three members will be appointed to this committee for a 3 year term by the Town Board. Initially, 1 for 1 year, 1 for 2 years, 1 for 3 years - through 3 year term. Members will be appointed at the township reorganization meeting.
3. Members will be compensated at a rate of \$50.00 per review.
4. The mission of the committee members is to provide the Town Board with their input, ideas, viewpoints, concerns and to assist in identifying possible conditions.
5. Of the members, two shall be resident homesteaders in the township and one shall be a non-resident landowner.

PART II

Text To Accompany Town of French Zoning Map

This document is the result of the Town of French taking a pro-active approach to future land use and growth within the area. Numerous community residents, both seasonal and year round, contributed their time, effort and expertise to this process. Because so many citizens participated, the end product is a solid one. This text is meant to accompany the zoning map in an attempt to shed light on how and why this process was conducted, and to give guidance to decision makers with land use authority. What follows is a general background of French Township that highlights community assets, emphasizes that continued growth is inevitable, and suggests problems associated with development must be addressed. There is an explanation of the township rezoning process, which emphasized citizen participation and local decision making. A list of the zone districts that were actually changed, and why they were changed, give meaning to the map, and definitions of what the land use districts mean, help clarify distinctions between them. Finally is the public notice that was sent out to every property owner in the community inviting them to participate in shaping their future community. It was the overwhelming fondness for this unique area that motivated people to initiate this change. Those that participated deserve to be commended in making the Town of French a more livable community for everyone.

Township Rezoning Process

During the fall of 1994, the county gave notice to all townships that they would soon be producing new geographic information system (GIS) zoning maps. The county recommended that townships review their current maps, and suggest desired changes. As a result, the French Town Board asked county planning staff to give a presentation relating to the existing land use and zoning regulations. The Board decided to appoint a committee to study the current map, and make recommendations to update it.

The committee held several working meetings that were open to the public. Issues taken into consideration were: current land use patterns (i.e. commercial, residential, recreational, undeveloped), desired future land use patterns, land ownership (i.e. private, public), lakes, rivers, wetlands, forest management, and roads.

A draft plan was developed, and presented to the French Town Board at two public hearings. From the start, the number one goal of the Town Board was to involve as many residents as possible throughout the entire process. To facilitate public input, letters explaining the procedure were sent out to every property owner in the township. In addition, informational boards composed of maps and written descriptions were posted at three separate public locations.

The public hearings were well attended, and as a result of public testimony, the Town Board made several changes to the draft map to meet the desires of local property owners. The final map was presented and approved without change by the St. Louis County Planning Commission, and County Board. The outcome of the process resulted in many substantial changes to how land use patterns will develop in the future. Following is a brief outline of the most notable changes to the map, and the intent behind them:

Major Lakes Changed from Shoreland Mixed Use to Residential are Sturgeon (except east side), Little Sturgeon, South Sturgeon, Side (except south and west shores), Perch and Beatrice. Dimensional standards remain the same. The lakes are predominantly developed with residential uses, and little undeveloped property exists. The intent of this change is to promote continued residential use around the lakes and prohibit commercial uses except those that are clearly secondary and residential in character. The SMU district shall remain where there is existing commercial land use, and future commercial uses may be located in this area.

Smaller Lakes Most of the township's small lakes were formerly zoned RES-5 (Residential), and were rezoned to RES-4, with a few exceptions. The significance of this change is a lot size increase from 2.5 acres and 200 feet of width, to a minimum of 4.5 acres and 300 feet of width.

Shannon Lake changed from RES-5 to SENS-2. All land ownership on Shannon within French is government owned, but the new zone district would only allow residential uses on 17 acre lots, with 600 feet of frontage. The intent is to preserve the lake's existing character if ownership ever became private.

Luna Lake was formerly classified as RES-5, and was changed to SMU-4. The 160 acres of land surrounding the lake is owned by Al Diehl and Mike Salminen, who were very active in the review process. Their specific desire is to potentially develop the property as a borrow pit, which would not be allowed under the Residential use district.

Sturgeon and Shannon Rivers Property adjacent to the rivers is changed from FAM-1 to MUNS-3, which decreases the lot size requirement from 35 acres to 9 acres. The 300 foot river corridor was changed to RES from SMU to limit uses along the river to residential in nature.

Interior of McCarthy Beach Park Changed from FAM-1 to SENS-2 with the intent to preserve wilderness character.

Highway 5 Corridor (1.5 miles adjacent to the south township boundary) This is the major corridor entering the township. There was a change from MUNS-4 to MUNS-3, which makes it open to businesses through a conditional use permit, but development must be on 9 acre lots.

County Road 730 (East Road) There was a change from a 4.5 acre lot size requirement (SMU-4), to a nine acre minimum (SMU-3).

LAND USE DISTRICTS

FOREST AGRICULTURAL MANAGEMENT (FAM) - This district is intended to recognize and promote the development of the forestry, agricultural and recreational uses. It is typically used in areas where land is developed at very low densities, and where there is often considerable government and corporate ownership. High impact commercial and light industrial uses, that are not compatible with an urban setting, are allowed. Examples are: feed lots, utility facilities, race tracks, slaughterhouses, salvage yards, permanent forest processing activities, and landfills.

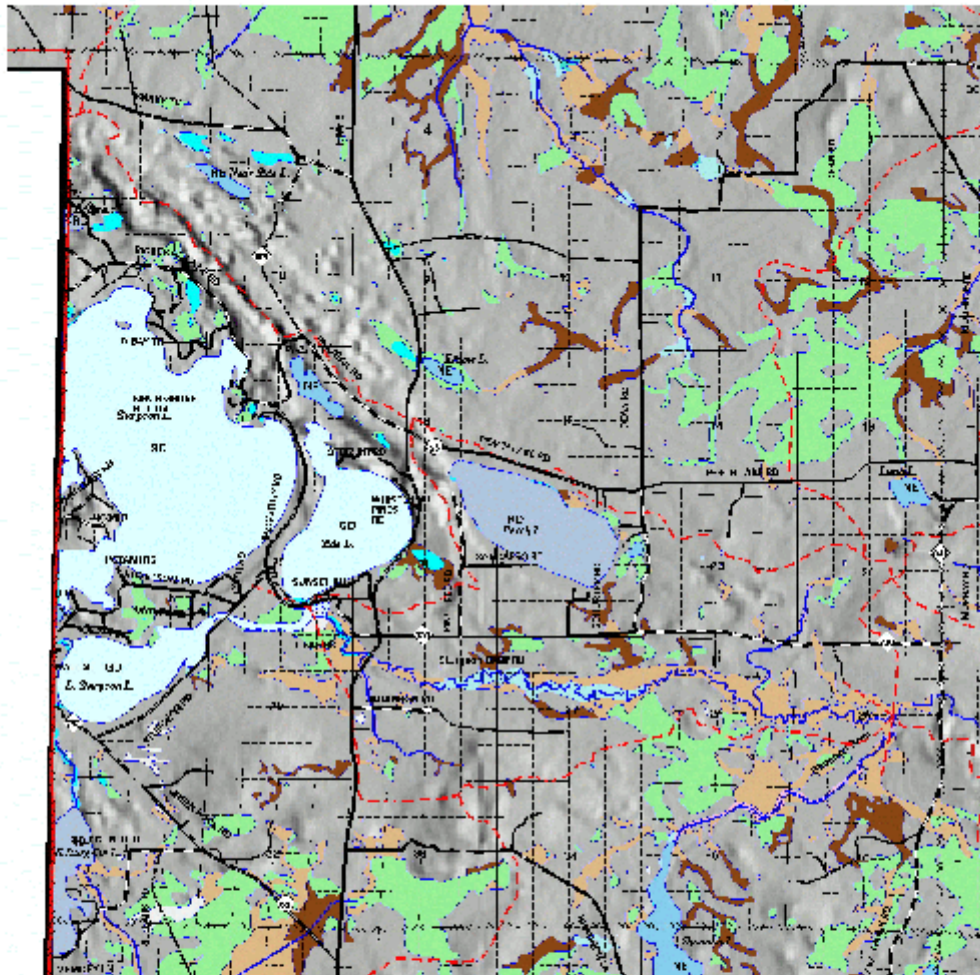
MULTIPLE USE (NON-SHORELAND) (MUNS) - Zoned to accommodate a wide range of commercial, residential and light industrial uses outside shoreland areas. Commercial and light industrial examples include: taverns/restaurants, convenience stores, kennels, home businesses, borrow pits, airports, salvage yards, contaminated soils disposal, and manufacturing.

SHORELAND MIXED USE (SMU) - This zone district allows a wide range of residential, commercial and light industrial uses that are compatible in shoreland areas. Examples include: seasonal and year-round residences, home businesses, resorts, condominium projects, convenience stores, tavern/restaurants, office buildings, marinas, gravel pits, and contaminated soil disposal.

RESIDENTIAL (RES) - is used in shoreland and non-shoreland areas. The intent is to promote a high quality residential living environment where commercial activities are minimized. Examples of commercial activities allowed are home businesses, residential condominium projects, convenience stores, and other low-impact commercial uses that are compatible to residential neighborhoods.

SENSITIVE AREAS (SENS) - This district is appropriate for areas that are unsuitable for intense development due to the existence of small lakes and wetlands, flooding, steep slopes, wildlife habitat and natural forested areas. Residential uses are allowed.

French 60-21



Saint Louis County
Planning Department
July 21, 1999

Wetland Types

- Type 1 - Seasonally Flooded
- Type 2 - Wet Meadow
- Type 3 - Shallow Marsh
- Type 4 - Deep marsh
- Type 5 - Shallow Open Water and Lakes

- Type 6 - Shrub Swamp
- Type 7 - Wetland Swamps
- Type 8 - Bogs
- Other
- Riverine

Uplands

Watershed Boundary

- Minor Watershed
- Major Watershed

* NOTE *

This map was prepared primarily by stereoscopic analysis of high altitude aerial photography. Data for wetlands are derived from a digital analysis of the map, with a verification of the wetland boundaries established through photographic interpretation. In addition, some small wetlands and those obscured by cover levels may not be included on this map.

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TOWN OF FRENCH PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

A public hearing regarding proposed changes in the Town of French zoning map will be conducted by the Town Board on:

Tuesday, July 25, 1995, at 7:00 p.m., at the French Community Center.

The proposed rezoning is the result of the following:

- ? St. Louis County has asked all townships to review the new GIS (geographic information system) zoning maps, and to make changes relating to future land use objectives.
- ? The Town Board appointed a committee to study the current zoning map, and develop a proposed draft map to present to the citizens of the town for your review and comment.
- ? Four committee and three regular Town Board meetings have addressed the issue recently and now is the time for positive public input.
- ? The goal of the committee was to create a draft plan that promotes land use planning for future growth and development in the Town of French, while providing a quality environment for the residents. It is a primary goal of the committee and Town Board to involve as many residents as possible in this effort.
- ? Issues taken into consideration relating to the draft plan include: current zoning, current land use (i.e. commercial, recreational, and residential uses), future land use, ownership (i.e. private, public sector), lakes, rivers, wetlands, forest management and roads.
- ? Zoning maps of current and proposed classifications will be posted 2 weeks prior to the hearing at the Community Building, in the Post Office, and the Riverside Inn.
- ? As an owner of property in the Town of French you are being informed of the proposed zoning map changes. You are greatly encouraged to attend the hearing and participate in the process. If you are unable to attend, please send your comments to the Town of French, P.O. BOX 29, Side Lake, MN 55781.

French Town Board